

## Photospot:

# Juvenile Spot-breasted Lapwing *Vanellus melanocephalus*

Ron Demey<sup>a</sup> and Rich Andrews<sup>b</sup>

**Première photo d'un Vanneau d'Abyssinie *Vanellus melanocephalus* juvénile.** Le Vanneau d'Abyssinie *Vanellus melanocephalus* est endémique à l'Éthiopie, où il fréquente les prairies et landes à 1.800–4.200 m d'altitude. Étant localement fréquent à commun et relativement facile à observer, il est remarquable que son écologie demeure largement inconnue. Seulement un nid, trouvé en avril 1970, a été décrit, tandis que son régime alimentaire et même son plumage juvénile ne sont pas documentés du tout. Une photo d'un juvénile, prise en décembre 2014 sur le plateau de Sanetti, est présentée ici. Au même endroit, des adultes semblaient en train de prendre des petits graviers, probablement utiles au broyage de certains éléments de nourriture – un comportement qui n'avait apparemment pas encore été signalé pour l'espèce.

**S**pot-breasted Lapwing *Vanellus melanocephalus* is endemic to Ethiopia, where it occurs in highland grassland and moorland at 1,800–4,200 m, although mainly above 3,000 m (Keith 1988). It ranges from the Simien Mountains in the north to the Bale Mountains in the south; the latter being a stronghold where >50 pairs have been found breeding (Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society 2001, Ash & Atkins

2009). Although its population, roughly estimated at <10,000 individuals, is relatively small and its range restricted, the species is not considered to be threatened (BirdLife International 2015). It is locally frequent to common and easily observed.

It is therefore all the more remarkable that so little is known about the species' ecology. Only one nest has ever been described. Found in the Bale Mountains at 4,200 m on 25 April 1970



**Figure 1.** Juvenile Spot-breasted Lapwing *Vanellus melanocephalus*, Sanetti Plateau, Ethiopia, 1 December 2014 (Rich Andrews)

Vanneau d'Abyssinie *Vanellus melanocephalus* juvénile, Plateau de Sanetti, Éthiopie, 1er décembre 2014 (Rich Andrews)



**Figure 2.** Adult Spot-breasted Lapwing *Vanellus melanocephalus*, Sanetti Plateau, Ethiopia, 1 December 2014 (Rich Andrews)

Vanneau d'Abyssinie *Vanellus melanocephalus* adulte, Plateau de Sanetti, Éthiopie, 1er décembre 2014 (Rich Andrews)

(not 1972, as erroneously stated in Hayman *et al.* 1986), it consisted of a shallow scrape and contained four eggs (Urban *et al.* 1970). The only other breeding report is from August, in Shoa district (Moltoni & Ruscone 1940–44 in Urban & Brown 1971). The lapwing's diet remains undescribed and, curiously, even its juvenile plumage (Keith 1988, Wiersma 1996, Redman *et al.* 2009), while an internet search has not revealed any photographs of young birds.

In December 2014, RA observed a group of Spot-breasted Lapwings on the Sanetti Plateau, in Bale Mountains National Park, and photographed a juvenile (Fig. 1). Compared to the crisp plumage of the adult (Fig. 2), it is conspicuously duller. The crown and throat appear dusky, as the black feathers are tipped white or buffish. The white supercilium is broader and not sharply delimited. The grey-brown upperpart feathers have narrow pale fringes. The upper breast is narrowly streaked grey-brown, whereas the adult's is more boldly marked with greyish-black streaks and spots. The small, oval, lemon-yellow wattle in front of the eye is already present, but the narrow orbital ring is

lemon-yellow, whereas it is deep yellow to orange in the adult. The legs, which are deep yellow in the adult, are a duller, paler yellow. These features indicate that the bird was a relatively recently fledged juvenile. Combined with the only known breeding reports, this suggests that the species has a very protracted or variable breeding season, which would not generally be expected for a plover with a restricted range occurring at high elevations (T. Prater *in litt.* 2015).

While photographing the Spot-breasted Lapwings, RA noticed that some appeared to be taking grit from the road (Fig. 3); at 07.30 hrs it was cold (3°C) and no evidence of insects was visible. Although plovers (Charadriidae) are known to occasionally take grit, probably to grind ingested nutritious food items (Piersma 1996), this has apparently not been described previously for this species.

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**Figure 3.** Spot-breasted Lapwings *Vanellus melanocephalus* apparently taking grit, Sanetti Plateau, Ethiopia, 1 December 2014 (Rich Andrews)

Vanneaux d'Abyssinie *Vanellus melanocephalus* apparemment en train d'avaler des petits graviers, Plateau de Sanetti, Éthiopie, 1er décembre 2014 (Rich Andrews)

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- <sup>a</sup> *Walter Thijsstraat 9, B-3500 Hasselt, Belgium. E-mail: rondemey1@gmail.com*
- <sup>b</sup> *14 Highdale Close, Whitchurch, Bristol BS14 0JS, UK. E-mail: richandrews@cvlbirding.co.uk*

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